

# Bridging the FE-HE Transition: A pilot study of the value of multimedia tutorials

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## SUMMARY

This poster reports on the first phase of a project funded by Greater Glasgow Articulation Project to develop a reusable multimedia resource for students making the transition from FE to the BA(Hons) Social Work programme at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). A package of 10 annotated PowerPoint tutorials were developed and piloted among FE and HE students, to clarify expectations and promote skills relating to academic writing. Provisional feedback suggests that the resource is an effective mechanism for supporting students' preparedness for the transition from FE to HE.

## BACKGROUND

As a result of widening participation and lifelong learning policies, articulation routes across the FE-HE interface are increasing (Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2009). However, widening participation can present challenges for both students and institutions (Leese, 2010). While assumptions may be made that students are ready for degree level study (Knox, 2005), there are fundamental differences between FE and HE (Hatt & Baxter, 2003) and for many, the transition may be like entering an alien environment (Askham, 2008). It is important, therefore, that strategies to facilitate the FE-HE transition are developed if widening participation is to be achieved (Knox, 2005). As a post-92 institution, GCU recruits a large proportion of students from FE backgrounds. On the BA(Hons) Social Work programme, 75% of students come from this non-traditional route. Typically, students are mature, first in their families to attend HE, and they often experience considerable anxiety and self-doubt in their abilities to study at a higher level (Cree et al., 2009). Recent partnership working with 14 local colleges has highlighted the need to better prepare FE students who wish to join the social work degree programme. This project aimed to respond to this need by developing a package of multimedia tutorials that could be accessed by FE students considering joining the programme.

## METHODS

Following an action research method (Coughlan & Brannick, 2005), 10 short annotated PowerPoint tutorials, addressing the areas of academic writing summarised below, were developed. As shown in Figure 1, tutorials included examples and interactive activities which were carefully tailored to the needs of social work students. The tutorials were piloted by 83 local college students studying social care and a range of other programmes, and five social work students who had recently articulated from FE to the social work degree programme. Tutorials were subsequently modified based on pilot feedback. Figure 2 summarises the action research process.

### Tutorial topics:

- Features of academic writing
- Formal writing
- Impersonal writing
- Using evidence
- Referencing and paraphrasing
- Writing paragraphs
- Preparing for essay writing
- Writing the introduction
- Writing the main body
- Writing the conclusion

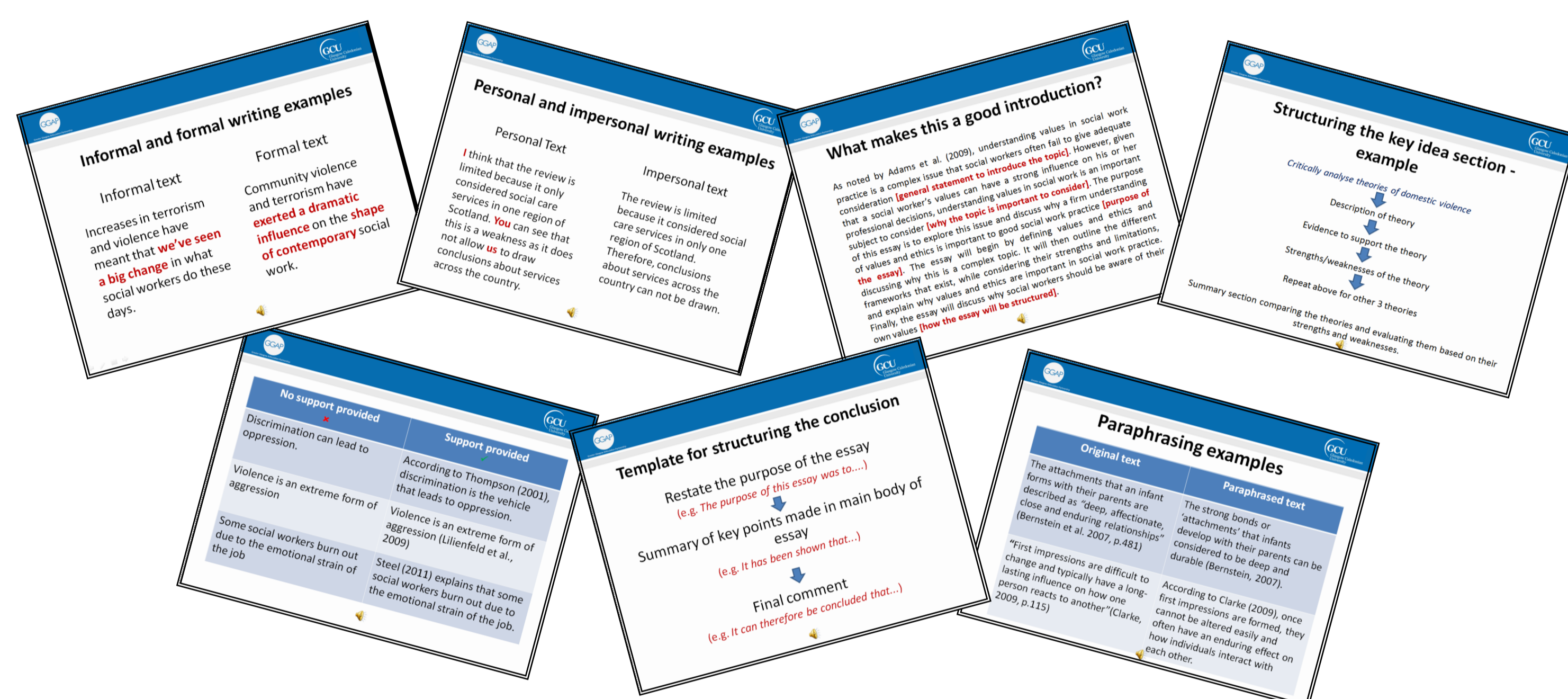


Figure 1—Screenshot examples of tutorial activities

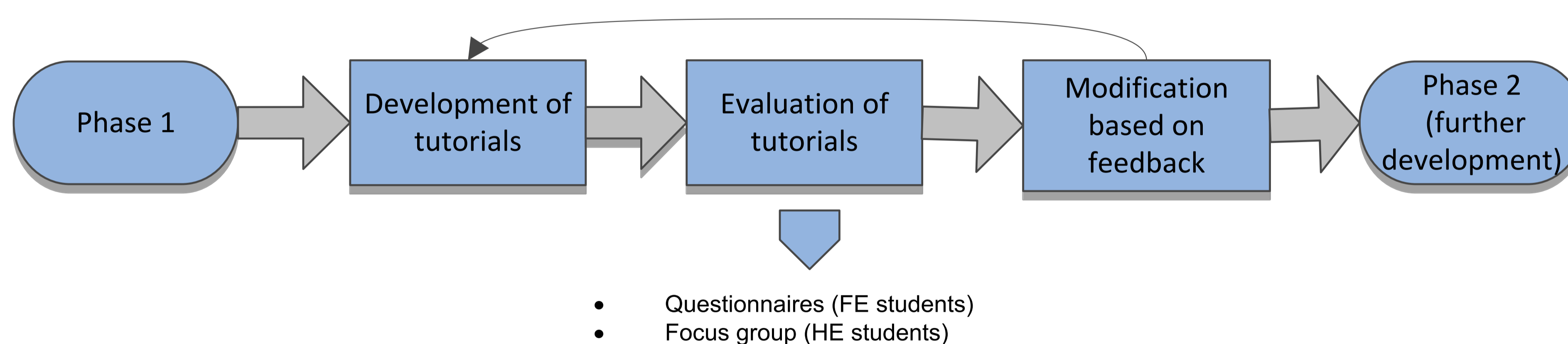


Figure 2 – Summary of action research process

## RESULTS

### Key findings

- 92% of FE students indicated that they would access the materials again.
- FE students reported that the tutorials had improved their confidence in academic writing, clarified expectations of university and increased their awareness of the importance of academic skills.
- Both FE and HE students commended the user-friendliness and reusability of the resource.
- Both FE and HE students commented favourably on the subject-specific content and examples used.
- There were no significant differences in feedback between FE students who were studying social care programmes and those who were studying programmes unrelated to social work.
- Suggestions for improvement included some minor modifications to simplify language.

### Illustrative quotations

- *It is explained clearly what university is like and what is expected of you and the work you do.*
- *The tutorials are straightforward and presented in simple terms.*
- *It helped me understand how important writing skills are for professional development and progression into university; I learned a lot of things I should be doing but don't.*
- *It has made me more aware and confident in what is expected at university and has given me good information that will be useful in the future.*
- *I think anyone in doubt or even thinking about going to university should see this.*
- *I am thinking about going to university so it helped me know what to expect and how to prepare my work and the skills before I go.*

## CONCLUSION

These findings strongly suggest that students are willing to engage with the resource and do find it effective in preparing them for degree level study. While the subject specificity of the resource was commended, the finding that there were no obvious differences in feedback between those who were studying social work related programmes and those who were not, suggests that the tutorials could be adapted and applied to other discipline areas. The project has now entered a second phase and developments will include:

- Extending the scope of tutorials to address additional academic skills (e.g. Critical appraisal, independent learning).
- Developing online guides to supplement tutorials.
- Producing video clips of staff and students to familiarise students with the institution.

As the project progresses, these resources will be embedded in a website that will be accessible by partner college institutions.